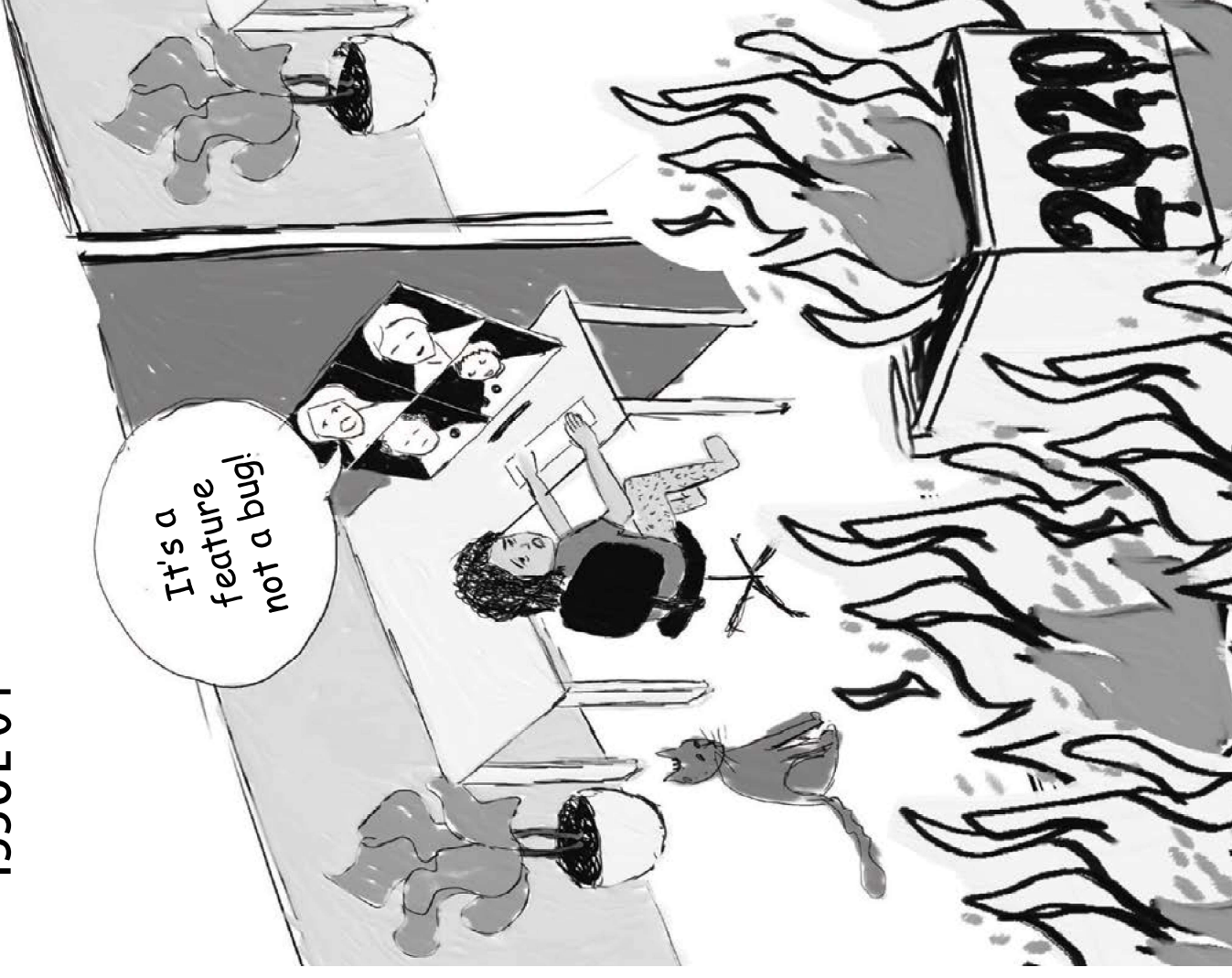


BUG REPORT!

ISSUE 04



Bug Report! is a zine about our experiences as tech workers in a deeply broken industry. Many thanks to everyone who contributed content to this issue!

WRITE US!

bugreportzine@protonmail.com

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Aid, to the delight of the managers. He often works unpaid extra hours making the rest of us look bad. Though I see a lot less of him when working from home, I hate seeing his stupid face more on Zoom than in person.

Many people have given up on having their cameras on in meetings unless they have to. Once, someone said that eating his lunch on camera felt too intimate. But we used to eat lunch together all the time! What he said made sense, though. The camera violates our personal space at home, no matter what we're doing when it's on. Work has always been encroaching on our personal lives but at least we could resist it before. Now, after more than a year, we're all worn out, impatient, avoidant. A good day at work is just being left alone.

The absurdity of modern work isn't new. The failure of capitalism to provide for everyone in society also isn't new. We're just experiencing these things more directly, making them harder to ignore.

Some people hope to be allowed to continue working from home long-term. It's definitely helpful if you're juggling other busy areas of life, or if you have needs that make commuting to or being in the physical office oppressive. But flexibility won't make the deeper problems of work go away.

For a few weeks in the spring when

the lockdowns began, our focus was on survival. We made sure to take care of the needs that arose in our social circles, our families, our neighborhoods, our communities. Mutual aid projects sprang up everywhere to get groceries and other resources to those who needed them. In that moment, it felt like we were embracing, out of necessity, an alternative way to live, based on cooperation to satisfy our collective needs. It called a lot into question. With so many people put out of work, were paychecks really the best way to sustain a society? Instead of continuing the drudgery dictated by the boss and the bottom line, what if we spent our time in isolation being "productive" in ways we freely chose, in ways best suited to these new conditions, in ways that best met everyone's needs? What if wealth wasn't concentrated in the hands of the few but shared so no one would have to worry about paying for food, rent, and housing? This wasn't daydreaming. It was common sense.

As the months went by, those energies waned. The focus shifted towards "returning to normal," which meant restoring economic activity and jobs. And I get it, we're all so fucking exhausted that back to normal sounds comforting. But in my moments of clarity, I remember the awfulness of in-person meetings and office politics and meaningless work tasks. I don't want to replace this hell with the one we had before. ✖

APRIL, 2021

We'd planned to publish this issue in the fall of 2020. There were setbacks. Because 2020. It's now April but it still feels like 2020.

Thanks to the many people who were able to contribute the fantastic, timely content in this issue, in spite of everything.

THE ROAD TO HELL IS PAVED WITH BULLSHIT JOBS

By Spruce Lee

This is hell. As I write this, there's been over half a million deaths in the U.S. from the coronavirus so far. People are falling apart—socially, mentally, physically—from the isolation. When we do have fleeting encounters with other human beings, they spark dread and anxiety. And wouldn't you know it? In hell, work still exists.

On bad days, which are most days, it feels like there's a beehive on fire inside my head. Thousands of bees, trapped and angry, buzzing around in my skull. Thousands of neurons misfiring on repeat as I sit at home and stare at my screen, trying to juggle work tasks. Something that normally takes 15 minutes now takes me 2 hours. I walk to my kitchen, forget why, return to my desk, walk to the kitchen again. I read an email six times to make sure I've understood it before replying, only to discover later I've misconstrued an important detail. The buzzing doesn't go away when I turn off my laptop, take a walk, or lie down. Sometimes it lasts for days.

I know I'm extremely privileged. Millions of people are going hungry and facing eviction because they lost their jobs. But let's be real about what exactly privilege means here. It's not

having a job. It's having continued access to housing, food, and the necessities of life. Every single person should have these things. Why should they depend on having a job, especially when millions of jobs vanished overnight in order to keep people safer?

It's not a privilege to force a fake smile during pointless Zoom meetings while we battle a deadly virus ravaging the entire world. It's an absurdity. And it's taking a serious toll on our collective well-being.

At the organization where I work, management goes on about the importance of self-care in this difficult time. But meanwhile, projects simply continue to plow ahead. And where the pandemic has thrown a wrench in the gears, we're inventing busywork out of fear of being laid off. Our output would be the same if everyone had only worked half time in the past year. And we'd all be healthier. There's nothing like inventing bullshit to look busy during a time of mass suffering and death to underscore how broken the system of work is, how poorly it has adapted to this crisis.

I have an annoying coworker who always says all the right things to demonstrate he's drunk the Kool-

CONTENTS

What Does "Diversity & Inclusion" Really Mean? ...**4**

By White and Privileged Mexican Guy

Offline: Quarantine Activities**7**

By Kat

Password**10**

By Val Walker

Mad Lib: Notice of Data Security Incident**12**

By Libby Brunchers

Workplace Safety Poster**19**

By Oh Shaw

Remotely Organized**20**

By Corg N. Izer

The Road to Hell is Paved with Bullshit Jobs**22**

By Spruce Lee

WHAT DOES “DIVERSITY & INCLUSION” REALLY MEAN?

By White and Privileged Mexican Guy

Tech companies speak about fostering a culture of Diversity & Inclusion. When you receive your first email with this catchphrase, featuring people of different races and genders with uncanny smiles in an explosively colorful background, you might call bullshit. What does this even mean? All the people around me are white dudes!

Even though companies have soured these terms, made them devoid of meaning, and have strong economic incentives to use them to play nice, they are extremely important and hold a revolutionary potential. If our industry were truly diverse and included people from different genders, races, and countries, it would look vastly different from its current state.

What is the problem if the industry is predominantly white and male? The issue is that our lived experience is narrow and limited. We don't know what it feels to have our well being disrupted by menstrual cramps. We don't know what it feels to be

alert on the streets because of the fear of being harassed. We don't know the anxiety from giving a good impression everywhere we go because others judge us based on our skin color or race.

In the bubble of privilege, the horizon seems limitless, it is possible to dream uninterrupted by threatening issues, and the world

doesn't seem as problematic as it really is. Since we can safely enjoy our lives and afford healthcare, we can think of new ways to make our reality more exciting with cool new gadgets, apps, and technologies that mirror the utopia promised to us by sci-fi movies.

WITHOUT REALIZING IT, WE DESIGN OUR SOFTWARE BASED ON OUR IDEALIZED LIVES.

Without realizing it, we design our software based on our idealized lives. Everybody's existence is smooth sailing, right? This new, disruptive, groundbreaking app will solve the problem of not being able to find the TV remote by tracking its location with utmost precision. Truth be told, most people can manage without this app. Regardless, venture capitalists (also white, male, and

mapping. Every week brought new issues to deal with: how do we want to make group decisions? We had been just kind of doing consensus, but that wasn't going to scale out well. How were we going to get people trained? How should we handle problematic employees? We are supposed to represent all of the workers, but toxic people exist and they can derail a nascent effort like this. One of our key organizers also told us she was quitting the company. She hadn't been laid off, but was concerned that more layoffs were coming, and she needed something more stable. I heard that from a few people.

There is a sense of fear permeating the entire company, and this extends to our organizing efforts. Would unionizing kill an already weak company? If the company finds out about our efforts would they fire us? Are we willing to risk our jobs for this? I think some people are unsure if unionizing is something worth doing and fear looking silly to their peers. There are very few tech companies that have unionized, and if we publicly fail I fear that will set organizing efforts back elsewhere. Or even worse, if we succeed in unionizing but the company ends up failing, that will be used as evidence of why unions are bad for workers. Our success or failure here won't just impact us, or even our company, but the industry as a whole.

When these fears dominate my

thinking I have to remind myself of why I am doing this in the first place. It is based on a conviction that we as workers must stand up and demand what we deserve, that we collectively act to benefit the whole. That our efforts here aren't just to improve working conditions for us, but to show other tech workers that they can do so too. To show that it can be done. And every week brings progress. We are meeting weekly, and a consistent number of people show up. We have decided how to make decisions, and are now trying to decide which union to go with. And we've learned things, like using the slack bot that randomly pairs you with someone else in the company to have a chat with to do stealthy 1:1s. It is a great way for us to meet with people we otherwise wouldn't and just hear about their lives, to understand what their concerns are. We learned that having concrete demands helps with 1:1s. It shows people that their concerns are shared by others, while also showing that we are serious about fixing them. We hear you, and we have a plan to fix your problem. Come help us do it, let's make this a better place to work at, and show other workers how they can do the same. 🦾

REMOTELY ORGANIZED

By Corg N. Izer

I'd always advocated for unions in workplaces, but I never really thought I'd have to make that belief real. After all, a strongly held belief that requires no sacrifice because it won't ever happen is the best kind. I get to feel the moral superiority of holding the right opinions without having to pay for holding them. I work in tech, and everyone knows tech doesn't unionize. Everyone is happy, or happy enough, and we are well compensated. So I was safe; right thoughts, no cost. Until the layoffs.

The layoffs weren't a surprise; we all knew they were coming. All the same, when they arrived it was a shock. A few days later I got a signal message from a friend: "Want to join the employee organizing group?"

When I joined the signal group there was a lot of talk, a lot of anger, a lot of ideas, but not a clear direction. Honestly, there still isn't. The ambiguity of this whole process was unexpected. Since I'd been going to Tech Worker Coalition meetings, I started asking around for anyone who had union contacts. I figured a good first step would be talking with the existing unions. At our first group meeting I shared what I'd learned so far, and we immediately hit several snags. People weren't even sure they wanted to go with a

union, maybe we could just organize ourselves? Also how would we handle contractors, we want them to be included. Also, we don't want cops in the union. No cops.

At this point we were just a handful of people meeting on Zoom. A lot of time was spent talking about what people were feeling, and processing the things that had happened. Was the company still the same? Had it lost its way? What did we even want? How does one even organize?

Most advice around organizing assumes you are physically in the same workplace. How do we do this when everyone is remote? There were more mundane questions too: was Signal good enough, or should we set up Slack for this, or maybe Discord? Some people showed up to that first meeting and never showed up again. Actually a lot of people did; our numbers fell a bit after that first meeting. I didn't know if people were too depressed to show up, or if we didn't have a clear plan so they didn't think it was worth their time.

After the first two or three meetings, things stabilized a bit. There was a core group of people showing up and we were slowly making progress. I got some training from the Communication Workers of America (CWA), talked with reps from a bunch of unions, and started workplace



Fratboys with no social sensibilities inadvertently deciding the fate of the world

Ultra profitable business models that create the world's richest men via exploitative practices

Software provided to government and military for imperialist expansion and perpetuation of the carceral state

Social media that creates echo chambers and precipitates us towards fascism by eroding the social fabric

Fossil fuel contracts that accelerate environmental collapse



privileged) will invest millions of dollars to make their realities more comfortable.

More than coming from pure evil, I think that this behavior in the industry comes from a place of naiveté and reluctance to learn beyond our boundaries. In my college years I was also excited about the promise of technology. I thought that I was a force of good that would create new tools that would enable others to change their lives for the better. I was young, eager to do things without thinking too much, and ignorant about the complexities of the world.

But then I gradually learned that things were not as I thought they were. I understood that people as qualified as I couldn't get the jobs I was getting because they didn't share my gender or skin color. I discovered that the company I worked for had contracts with businesses and institutions that

were accelerating climate change and incarcerating, mistreating, and deporting people from my own country.

I also learned that Big Tech is deeply American. When I moved to the United States from Mexico, I found a culture that forced me to assimilate, that was eager to misrepresent mine with sombreros and tequila shots, that assumes without ever asking the Other. It is a colonial, imperialist, and individualist culture that feigns superiority by reducing others' complex realities to ludicrous stereotypes.

The workplace silently adopts these white supremacist values and expects everyone to adhere to them. If you want to succeed, you need to build your own way, make your voice heard, and direct the spotlight towards you. It also invented the model minority myth, where the best immigrants are those that keep their heads down and work, adhering

to how things are done. This work environment led me to believe that there was only one right way to do things.

The protests sparked by the murder of George Floyd and the COVID-19 lockdown gave me a lot of time to think about my job and the role of tech companies in our political reality. As I spent my energy every day building web apps while the world around me was literally on fire, it became evident that what I do at work is not helping us solve the most pressing problems to make everybody's lives better.

I learned of alternative ways of looking at the world when our capitalist realism made everything so bleak. I took a class on colonialism and read many non Anglo-European, non white authors that showed that there are many ways to understand the world and to imagine better futures. Instead of the death cult of capitalism, I learned of a pluriverse of thought, which was created thanks to the diversity of the people bringing their ideas to the table.

Through these readings and my interactions with diverse individuals in organizing spaces, I saw how my worldview expanded and how I was compelled to care for the problems of others. The spaces I was in became so much more inclusive, imaginative, creative, and motivated to enact radical change thanks to the participation of people that didn't fit the straight white guy model.

6

Tech does have the potential to make meaningful things, and this has happened when oppressed people have participated. Many websites and apps provide accessibility for people with disabilities, but this only happened because they pressured the government to sign the American Disability Act, forcing companies to comply with accessibility guidelines. Or outside of the fringes of Big Tech, the Black Socialists of America are building the Dual Power app, which provides privacy and communication for grassroots organizing efforts.

I still have many questions and few answers, but I do know that right now, I need to shut up and listen. By working because I thought I was saving the world, I was inadvertently ignoring and silencing other voices that had very important things to say. If the hell of 2020 should serve some purpose, it should be to make many of us less cocky and more humble. It is time to let those who haven't call the shots. 🦋

WORKPLACE SAFETY POSTER

By Oh Shaw

Ergonomic Solutions help you to work ~~safety~~ For Capitalists



19

thing that was weird," he remarks, trying to sound casual, in hopes of not freaking his friend out. Reginald leans over and raises an eyebrow. "What was it?" he asks.

"Well, I made a comment and she had a weird reaction. Though weird isn't even the right name for it, it was creepy and... I don't know. Basically, it was almost as if I had stumbled on a hypnotic trigger," Wendell says, resting his head on the palm of his left hand.

"What did she say? What was the trigger?" Reginald asks, suddenly intensely interested.

"Well, she had a reaction to the phrase 'purge the less productive members—,'" Wendell begins, but as soon as the words leave his lips his face starts to go bone white as he witnesses what is happening in front of him. Reginald's eyes have rolled in his head and his body has suddenly sat straight up in his chair. Convulsions wrack his body and he begins foaming at the mouth. The foam is red in color. Wendell rushes to his side, trying to see if he can offer any medical assistance; he has seen seizures before in movies, but never had to deal with one himself! As he leans over to try and help his friend, Reginald begins to mutter the same phrase, over and over: "Shadows ride in on the wind, burning all that they touch. A stranger crawls down the path; a stranger crawls in through the open window; the aeon of the Outer Darkness is here."

As he says this, the skin around his eyes and mouth starts to blacken. 🦋

OFFLINE: QUARANTINE ACTIVITIES

By Kat

Shakespeare wrote King Lear during a plague. Taylor Swift released 2 albums during the pandemic. A Facebook friend I haven't talked to since high school just bought a house and got engaged. Someone on my timeline has 5000 RTs on a tweet announcing their new VC job and move to New York City. And I have tried and failed at least a dozen different hobbies in my attempts to fill the days with something other than work and endless scrolling.

WRITING	
Cost	\$
Difficulty to exploit for hustle culture?	Easy. You don't even have to actually finish a novel. Just say you're thinking about finishing that novel and let the Shakespeare comparisons roll in.
Would I rather be online?	Honestly how does one write without spending their designated writing time doing anything other than writing?
Overall rating	4/5. Ok once you get around to actually writing it's healing and cathartic in the short term and the long term.

SKATEBOARDING	
Cost	\$\$
Difficulty to exploit for hustle culture?	Hard. There are 4 year olds already doing kickflips while I'm stressing out about powerpoints. Doing a baby ollie is cool as fuck to me but its not gonna give me a million views on Tiktok.
Would I rather be online?	No! You can watch hours of skate tutorials and you still won't learn until you fall on your butt a few (or many) times.
Overall rating	6/5. I may be past my prime for the cool sk8r girl aesthetic but I'm still living out my 16 yr old self's dream!

BAKING	
Cost	\$-\$
Difficulty to exploit for hustle culture?	Medium. It's not (just) about making it taste good, it's about making it look good for the gram! That's extra work on your part to up those food photography skills and stunt on grandma bloggers' tired old chocolate chip cookies.
Would I rather be online?	Looking at other people's beautiful bakestagram is just less painful than coming out with one too many failed sourdough starters.
Overall rating	3/5. I wish I found my inner cake boss, but even after watching 5 seasons of Holiday Baking Championship, I think I'm more of a Nailed It! gal. Also why do I need a stand mixer for everything?! I'll stick to my store-bought cookie dough.

DRAWING/PAINTING	
Cost	\$--\$\$
Difficulty to exploit for hustle culture?	Hard. Nothing is more humbling than comparing your first painting to its original reference. Unless you're a natural you'll need a few months to a few years before showing off your work gets you reactions less akin to a mom praising their kid's macaroni art.
Would I rather be online?	Only so I can look at other people's beautiful art !!
Overall rating	5/5, but only after you get past the phase of chicken scratch doodles.



his way to his little desk “island” in the big office sea. His co-worker Reginald is at his desk, typing away on the keyboard, working on some document or piece of code that is probably due yesterday. Wendell removes his coat and sits at his desk, awaking his work computer from sleep mode as Reginald leans past his monitor and begins speaking to him.

“So, how is Carmen?” Reginald asks. Reginald has been at the company almost as long as Wendell, and while he wasn’t close friends with Carmen like Wendell is, he is still familiar and friendly with her.

“She’s...,” Wendell pauses for a second; what can he say here? That Carmen might have been brainwashed by the government for some unknown purpose? And no, I don’t have proof, you just have to trust me? “... Fine man, she’s doing fine. She says she is settling into her new place well, though she is still unpacking.”

“She talk about the job at all?” Reginald follows up. “Seemed like a weird situation from what I had seen on her Facebook, but she was pretty light on details there.”

“Yeah, she did not give me many more details. She was pretty light on details about her last job in general, though it sounded miserable from

what she described: long work hours, toxic culture that all but encouraged monstrous acts in the name of ‘competition,’ possessive of people—just a real hellhole of a place to find yourself trapped in,” Wendell replies.

“Damn, sorry to hear that. That shit will get to you after a while. An environment so controlling and hostile will eat away at your very soul until there is nothing left, swear to

God. It was a defense contractor too, right? Those places can be especially evil, I have heard.

Just completely soul sucking. They ask you to pour all of yourself into them until there is nothing left, slowly filling you up with

their own unique brand of inhuman corporate BS as they go,” Reginald says, nodding sagely as he continues to type away on some document he is writing on the computer, briefly pausing to take a sip of from a lukewarm cup of black coffee on the table next to his keyboard.

“Yeah, hearing all that makes me glad not to work at one of those places,” Wendell remarks, turning back to work on his PC. After a few minutes, Wendell starts thinking more about the situation and decides to trust Reginald with information about the strange situation with Carmen. “Actually there was just one other

**HER EYES ROLL
BACK IN HER HEAD,
REVEALING WHITES
THE COLOR OF
BLEACHED BONE...
SUDDENLY SHE
BEGINS TO SPEAK
IN A LOW CROAK**

stock still as before, eyes rolling up to reveal the whites. She speaks the same phrase again: "The shadow howls mockery at the crossroads. A new path emerges; a new window is open; a new aeon awakes." Then as before, her eyes close and her body relaxes.

Her eyes suddenly open, and she is seemingly back to normal and with that same quizzical look on her face.

Wendell nervously follows up with a response: "Uh, can we change the subject? Just don't feel like talking about it." He is beginning to put things together; for some reason his words have triggered a trance in Carmen, almost as if she has been brain-washed or hypnotized. But why? For what purpose? He figures he needs to bide his time until he can get enough pieces together to form a picture of the situation to help his friend.

"Okay sure," Carmen replies, obviously taken aback by Wendell's request. "What do you want to talk about?"

Wendell decides to shift the conversation to more mundane matters; partly because he wants to see how much his friend has changed since he saw her last, partly because he is genuinely frightened of stumbling on any other "triggers" during the conversation. They talk for an additional 45 minutes before both have to head back to their respective responsibilities: Wendell to his job,

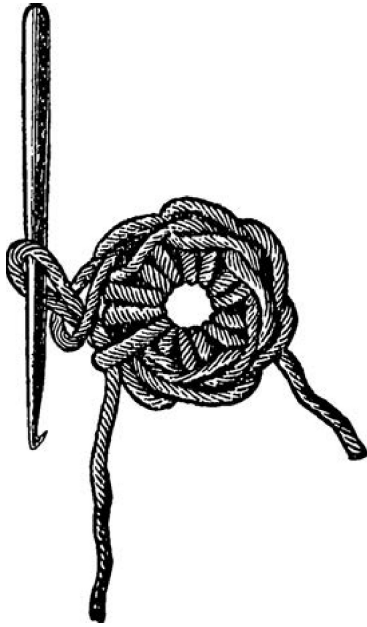
Carmen to her unpacking and re-arranging. Unfortunately Wendell did not learn much that could lead to an explanation of what he just encountered; his friend seems much the same as she always has been. She is slightly older, slightly more tired and cynical, but still as "Carmen" as she ever has been.

He mulls this over on his walk back to the office. The only explanation that comes to his mind is that it has something to do with her job, something about the work she was required to do that affected her. Maybe it was the projects she had to work on? She was working at a company that works with the Department of Defense, and Wendell has watched a documentary or two on all the things those in the government have done to people as part of things, like "MK Ultra." Maybe this is related? Or perhaps it was an effort undertaken by the company itself; implanting psychic triggers into its staff via hypnosis. But to what end? That is what Wendell cannot figure. And what is meant by this talk of "shadows," "crossroads," "paths," and "windows?" Not to mention "aeons," a word he has never even heard before. He sighs to himself, questions mounting in his mind as he walks through the front door of his office, past the security checkpoint, and up the elevator to the floor that holds his desk.

He makes his way through the open office space where he works, finding

KNITTING/CROCHET/EMBROIDERY

Cost	\$
Difficulty to exploit for hustle culture?	Easy. Right away you can crank out scarves, baby blankets, and any beginner pattern. You can be on your way to looking productive in less than a week!
Would I rather be online?	Depends on my mood. I guess I'd rather strain my eyes looking at embroidery threads than twitter threads.
Overall rating	4/5. Relaxing, portable, you can use what you make! but sometimes you prick your fingers.



RUNNING

Cost	\$
Difficulty to exploit for hustle culture?	Medium. There's a fine line between just looking like you've chosen the default activity for people going through a quarter life crisis and actually impressing people with your fitbit screenshots. As a pandemic runner, also going through a quarter life crisis, I'll say I am impressed with you and your runs no matter the distance!
Would I rather be online?	Only during the first mile of every run because it really sucks. And during the tail end of a run because I want to tell the world I've survived another run!
Overall rating	5/5. It keeps you healthy. You can channel your rage at capitalism, the pandemic, and the government into every sprint. And nothing beats the feeling of finishing another run.

PASSWORD

By Val Walker

There was no trace of sun left in the sky by the time Wendell got off the bus; it had been devoured by a fast moving bank of dull, gray clouds while he was riding. He looks up past the skyscrapers from his place on the sidewalk, taking in the lack of sun. He had intended this meeting with his friend Carmen to begin on a cheery note, but he realizes now that was expecting too much in this climate. Wendell hates the weather in the city: the seemingly constant overhang of clouds mutes the colors, making all the steel and glass skyscrapers appear drab and faded.

Wendell shivers and pulls his jacket tighter around himself, then starts to walk down the street in the direction of the coffee shop he is scheduled to meet Carmen at. The place was a favorite of the two back before Carmen had moved out of state; they would spend many a morning talking about work and society and life over coffee and pastries. They had met years ago and been friends ever since. They both began new jobs as engineers at a local technology company on the same day, working for the same manager. They spent a lot of time together, working through the particulars of how to handle certain proprietary technologies or bitching about decisions from higher ups they didn't

agree with. They quickly forged a strong bond. Even as time moved on and they each pursued different goals and different paths in life, they still made sure to connect often. This continued right up until Carmen got a job offer out of the blue from a big firm across the country. It seemed to both of them the natural next step in her career (and the salary package they were offering was nothing to sniff at either). Their parting was melancholic, as it always is when close friends move away, but they promised to keep in touch.

They chatted frequently over IM or through phone and video calls during the first few months of Carmen's new job. But texting felt impersonal and formal, and phone and video conversations felt much more cold and detached. The two drifted apart as other things in life started to take higher priority, though they never completely stopped talking.

When Carmen told Wendell a month ago that she was moving back, it came as something of a shock. According to Carmen, the company folded after a string of catastrophic failures that resulted in enormous fines from the federal government, fines the company could never pay back without going into bankruptcy and liquidating everything. She felt

memories of specific events at all from that time. It all blends together into a blob in my mind." She leans back in her chair and crosses her arms at this, frowning. "Except for the end of course. The end was very memorable," she says, as a wry grin spreading across her face as she recalls the absurdity of the event.

"Regardless, it doesn't sound like it had a positive impact on you," Wendell says, the pained smirk on his face causing a notable twitch in his moustache. "Sometimes you need to do something to know you shouldn't do it ever again. You know?" Carmen says, reaching over and picking up her drink with one hand. She takes a long sip, then begins again: "But I don't want to hog the conversation here! Tell me, what's up with you nowadays? How are things at the old place?"

"Ah well, you know how it is. Things really haven't changed much there. The same people are in the same places, doing the same fucked up things, year in, year out. Things are just as much a mess now as they ever were," Wendell replies, smirking slightly.

"I mean, surely things aren't exactly the same, there has to be some difference, even if the general 'shape' of things is similar. People coming, people leaving, responsibilities getting shuffled around, you know," Carmen replies. A mischievous grin crosses her face. "That moustache, for instance, I know is a new, substantial

change."

"You bet your ass it's substantial!" Wendell says, laughing. "Took me a long time to grow this thing! You really have to work a lot on cultivating it. They don't tell you that when you start growing it. You know, trim everything, keep it nice and tidy, purging the less productive members—"

As soon as Wendell finishes the word, Carmen suddenly sits upright and freezes stock still. Her face has become locked in a blank expression. Gradually, her eyes roll back in her head, revealing whites the color of bleached bone, whites with gentle lines of red at the edges, lines of red almost like small bits of string. Suddenly she begins to speak in a low croak, completely unlike her speaking voice. "The shadow howls mockery at the crossroads. A new path emerges; a new window is open; a new aeon awakes." Her eyes then close, and her body visibly relaxes.

Her eyes flutter open again. "I'm sorry, what did you say just now? Didn't quite catch it," Carmen says, a quizzical look on her face.

Wendell, terrified about the change in his friend and unsure of what just happened, replies: "Uh, I believe I was talking about how I work on my moustache; talking about how I purge the less productive members."

When the words leave his lips, Carmen shuts down again, going

handle it until it happens; gives life an 'unmoored' feeling. I felt adrift on an open sea, with no land in sight. I still do, really. I haven't had a real chance to relax since then."

"At least you were able to find a place out here without much trouble, it sounded like. You never really told me what made you move back," Wendell says, resting his elbow on the table and leaning forward a little. In an oddly comforting way it's beginning to feel like old times, just the two of them at a table in a café, bitching about work problems.

"It was the loneliness, really. I felt completely isolated there; we worked on a company campus on the edge of the city, without any other people around us, and we worked long hours so there was little time to explore the city or get to know the neighborhood or community. When I wasn't working, I was sleeping, or trying to address the basic chores so as to try and maintain some semblance of sanity." Carmen takes a sip of coffee, then places the cup back on the table and leans back in the chair. She tilts her head to the side and stares out the window. From where her head is pointing, it is obvious she is not staring at anything in particular. She looks as if she is watching an image of her

past self, a self that feels trapped in their mistakes. It's an image she cannot touch or effect, no matter how much she wants to interfere. "It was just a very lonely time. Didn't really make any friends out there.

There wasn't time for a life outside of work, and people in the company were so catty and competitive I could never really trust anyone enough to open up to them and form friendships. The worst part is how that atmosphere made me act; I found myself becoming

part of the problem, adapting to their way of thinking, picking up their lingo just from the sheer amount of it I was exposed to every day. It almost felt like I was being brainwashed. Like I was losing pieces of myself and those pieces being replaced with something dark, occupying my mind with something alien."

She closes her eyes for a moment and lets out a long sigh. "You know, I honestly don't remember much of it." Wendell raises an eyebrow at this. "Oh not like that. It's not like I have a blank space in my memory, like amnesia or a fugue state or anything like that," Carmen replies, noting Wendell's concern. "More that everything was so similar all the time, nothing really 'stuck'; you know? When I think back to it I can't recall much beyond impressions and emotions. I don't really have many

burned by the entire situation, and was moving back to feel like she had some semblance of control over her life. Meeting up again at the old haunt for their traditional coffee and pastries had been her idea.

Wendell, for his part, is nervously excited for the meeting. It has been a couple years since he last saw Carmen in person, and while he does get updates on her, he still finds himself wondering about what she will be like when they meet again. With anxieties and ruminations flying around his head, he approaches the double doors of the coffee shop, pulls them back and walks in.

He stops and looks around the industrial-chic interior, searching for a familiar face. Finally he sees Carmen sitting at a table in the corner. She is alternating between looking at her phone and looking out the window. She looks much the same as when he last saw her, albeit slightly older and slightly skinnier. Suddenly she looks over and sees him, and her face quickly shifts from a blank, bored stare to a wide grin as she motions for him to come over. Wendell feels a smile coming over his face as well, and he makes his way to the table. Carmen stands up and gives Wendell a warm hug, and then they both sit at the table.

"God, I really can't believe it's been so long since we saw each other last. It feels like it was yesterday but also half a lifetime ago!" remarks Carmen as they both sit down at the table.

"It has been a hot minute," replies Wendell, leaning back in his chair, crossing his arms behind his head. "I am damn glad we were able to make the time for this. Things are so different now than they were years ago. The city is so different too! I am just glad this place is still around. I honestly hadn't thought about it since we were here last."

"So many of the old places are gone now. It's sad. It really emphasizes how quickly things can change. Not exactly a lesson I had wanted to have re-learn, given recent events, but..." Carmen says, folding her hands around her drink on the table, taking comfort in the familiar warmth of the cup.

"Yeah, was that all as sudden for you as it seemed? Because it seemed lightning fast to me. I would have gotten emotional whiplash," Wendell says, tilting his head and grimacing.

"Oh, I practically broke my neck with how much they were whipping us back and forth," Carmen says. "It was 'we have to get this out ASAP, so let's crunch, crunch, crunch!' for a while. Then before my project was even done, they just pulled us into a room and told everyone the entire company was being liquidated to pay off creditors and we had to find something new! Going from 16-hour work days to no work at all was a shock.

You don't really know how you will

...continued on page 14

MAD LIB: NOTICE OF DATA SECURITY INCIDENT

By Libby Brunchers



Dear _____
PERSON IN ROOM

_____ recently learned of an incident that one
COMPANY (use throughout)
of our third-party service providers, _____
NAME OF A BAND (use throughout)
experienced, which involved information about members of the

_____ community.
VERB ENDING IN -ING

According to _____, between _____
SAME NAME OF A BAND MONTH
and _____, an unauthorized _____ had
MONTH ANIMAL
access to backup files for the _____
PLURAL NOUN VERB ENDING IN -ING
software. We also retained outside _____ experts,
NOUN
including a vendor to review the _____ at issue.
NOUN

The incident may have involved the following: _____
PLURAL NOUN PLURAL NOUN
_____, _____, and date of birth. In
a minority of instances, _____ was also involved.
NOUN
Finally, a single _____ account number for one
ADJECTIVE
_____ also was compromised.
NOUN

_____ has informed us that it has no indication that any
SAME NAME OF A BAND
of the _____ actually was _____, and
NOUN VERB, PAST TENSE
that it has no reason to believe that any of this _____
has been or will be misused, or will otherwise be _____
publicly.

_____ nonetheless has notified the
SAME COMPANY
affected _____ of the incident and provided them
PLURAL NOUN NOUN
with _____ they can _____ to
PLURAL NOUN VERB VERB, PAST TENSE
_____ their _____ information.
VERB ADJECTIVE

_____ experts are _____ the dark web
NOUN VERB ENDING IN -ING
for any exchange of _____ related to this incident.
PLURAL NOUN
_____ also stated that they have reported the incident
SAME NAME OF A BAND
to the _____.
GOVERNMENT AGENCY

Any person who has questions about the incident may call our toll-free
number at: 1-800-BUY-DATA, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Pacific Time.

MAD LIBS